CRIME
NO. 27
MAR.
10¢
CRIME SUSPENSTORIES
JOLTING TALES OF
TENSION
IN THE
EC TRADITION!

MANIAC at LARGE

FROM THE VERY MINUTE I CAME TO WORK THIS MORNING FOR MY NEW JOB IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY, I'VE HAD THAT HORRIBLE FEELING... THAT GNAWING, FRIGHTENING FEAR THAT SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME. EVER SINCE OLD MRS. PRITCHARD, THE HEAD LIBRARIAN, ASSIGNED ME TO THE CHECK-OUT DESK AND SHOWED ME HOW TO STAMP THE DUE-DATES ON THE BORROWED BOOKS, I'VE SAT IN THE WHISPERING SILENCE AND FELT THE TERROR INSIDE ME MOUNTING. ALL DAY, I HAVE SEEN THE PEOPLE COME AND GO IN THE QUIET. ALL DAY, I HAVE LISTENED TO THE BIG WALL CLOCK'S INCESSANT TICKING, AS ITS COLD, BLACK HANDS CREPT AROUND ITS FACE. AND ALL DAY, I HAVE DREADED THE MOMENT WHEN CLOSING TIME WOULD COME AND I WILL HAVE TO GO OUT INTO THE NIGHT STREETS... THE STREETS WHERE A HOMICIDAL MANIAC STALKS HIS EIGHTH VICTIM...

IT'S *ALMOST NINE*, BLANCHE. WE'LL *STAY LATE* TONIGHT AND I CAN SHOW YOU HOW TO FILE THE CARDS OF THE *BOOKS* BORROWED TODAY, *ALL RIGHT?*

HUH? OH... ER... *OF COURSE*, MRS. PRITCHARD.

D-F

A-D

MRS. PRITCHARD SMILES AND SLIPS OFF HER STOOL AT THE CHECK-IN DESK AND GLANCES AROUND... PEERING DOWN THE LONG LIBRARY ROOM... PAST THE SHELVES OF SILENT BOOKS... TO THE ONE LONE PERUSER SEATED AT THE TABLE IN THE READING SECTION...

AS I *GO OUT*, I'LL *SNAP THE LOCK* SO NO ONE *ELSE* CAN COME IN. *YOU* CAN TAKE CARE OF *HIM* WHEN HE'S READY TO *LEAVE*...

WHERE... WHERE ARE YOU *GOING?*

MY HEART BEGINS TO THUMP WILDLY IN MY CHEST AND ALL THE TERRORIZING FEARS I'VE HAD ALL DAY CASCADE BEFORE ME AS MRS. PRITCHARD STARTS FOR THE FRONT DOOR...

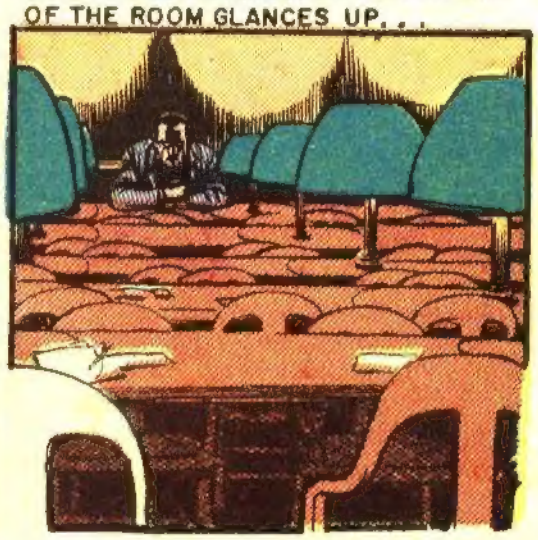
WHY, IF WE'RE *STAYING LATE*, DEAR, WE *OUGHT* TO HAVE A *BITE TO EAT!* I'M *JUST* GOING OUT FOR *COFFEE* AND *SANDWICHES*. IS THERE SOMETHING *WRONG?* YOU LOOK *PALLID!*

N-NO, MRS. PRITCHARD! *THERE'S* NOTHING *WRONG!*

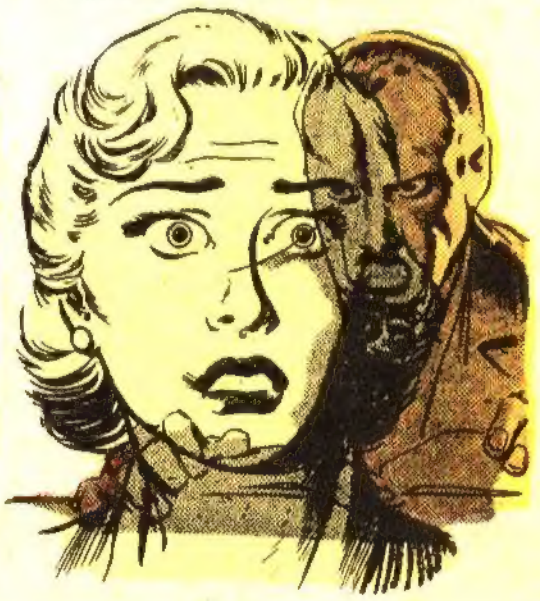
LE EAWS

MRS. PRITCHARD OPENS THE DOOR AND HER BONEY WHITE HAND CRABS UP AND DOWN ITS EDGE UNTIL SHE FINDS THE CATCH-BUTTONS...

SHE GOES OUT AND THE DOOR GLIDES CLOSED BEHIND HER, SNAPPING SHUT WITH A CLICK THAT ECHOES AND RE-ECHOES IN THE SILENCE. THE LONE READER AT THE FAR END OF THE ROOM GLANCES UP...



MY HEART STOPS. HIS EYES SEEM TO BURN AT ME FROM ACROSS THE BIG, SHADOWY, HUSHED LIBRARY...



I GLANCE AT THE WALL CLOCK. IT'S JUST NINE. MY VOICE IS A VIBRATING SQUEAL, THROBBING WITH MY NERVOUSNESS...

I LOOK AROUND. I SEE SOME BOOKS ON MRS. PRITCHARD'S CHECK-IN DESK THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN RETURNED TO THE SHELVES...

I PICK THEM UP AND SWING AROUND THE COUNTER, MY HEELS CLICKING, RUPTURING THE SILENCE...

HE LOOKS UP SHARPLY... GLARING AT ME...

I MOVE DOWN THE SHELVES, REPLACING THE BOOKS, FEELING HIS EYES UPON MY BACK... BURNING... SEARING...

I CROSS TO THE NON-FICTION SECTION WITH THE LAST BOOK AND IT SLIPS FROM MY CLUMSY, NERVOUS GRASP AS I PASS THE NEWSPAPER RACK AND SEE THE BLACK, UGLY, SCREAMING HEADLINES...

THE BOOK HITS THE LIBRARY FLOOR WITH AN EXPLOSIVE CLAP BUT I DON'T HEAR IT. I STARE AT THE HEADLINES I'VE READ A MILLION TIMES BEFORE...

SUDDENLY I *KNOW* WHAT'S BEEN BOTHERING ME ALL DAY. I *KNOW* WHAT I'VE BEEN *AFRAID* OF. IT'S BEEN A KIND OF *PREMONITION*... A *WARNING!* TONIGHT.. I *KNOW* IT *NOW*...*TONIGHT THAT MANIAC IS GOING TO GET ME!*

A CHAIR SCRAPES BEHIND ME. I WHIRL, GASPING. HE'S GETTING UP...

HE COMES TOWARD ME, SHUFFLING... GRINNING EVILY...

SORRY I *KEPT* YOU...

CHOKE... *THAT'S* ALL RIGHT! I HAVE *WORK*... TO DO... *ANYWAY*...

HE LOOKS AROUND AS HE MOVES CLOSER...

WORKING LATE ALL BY *YOURSELF?*

N-NO! MRS. PRITCHARD IS WORKING LATE, *TOO!*

HE GLANCES AT THE FRONT DOOR. MY BLOOD TURNS TO ICE. *THE FRONT DOOR IS LOCKED FROM THE INSIDE...*

WHERE'D SHE *GO?*

F-FOR *COFFEE*... AND *SANDWICHES*...

HE STARES AT ME...HIS BEADY LITTLE EYES TRAVELING OVER ME...

THEN SHE *WON'T BE BACK FOR A WHILE!*

SHE...SHE *OUGHT* TO BE BACK *ANY MINUTE! ANY MINUTE!*

I FEEL SUDDENLY SICK. MY STOMACH ROILS. *SEVEN TIMES* THE MANIAC HAS STRUCK. AND *I'M* TO BE HIS *EIGHTH VICTIM!*

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO *STAY* TILL SHE *DOES?* YOU SEEM *FRIGHTENED!*

N-NO! *THAT'S* ALL RIGHT! I'LL BE *PERFECTLY SAFE*...

HE SHRUGS...

I DON'T *BLAME YOU!* THE *WHOLE TOWN* IS IN THE GRIP OF FEAR WITH THAT *MANIAC* STILL LOOSE! YOU'VE GOT A *RIGHT* TO BE FRIGHTENED!

Y-YES...

HE STEPS TO THE COUNTER AND HESITATES...STALLING...

HE GRINS AGAIN. I FEEL A LITTLE FOOLISH AND HURRY AROUND THE COUNTER TO PICK UP MY STAMP. HE LEANS CLOSE TO ME AS I REMOVE THE CARD AND IMPRESS THE DUE-DATE...

HE PICKS UP THE BOOK, SCOWLING. HE GOES TO THE DOOR...

HE GOES OUT. THE DOOR GLIDES CLOSED BEHIND HIM, THE LOCK SNAPS SHUT, AND I BREATHE A DEEP SIGH OF RELIEF...

I LISTEN TO HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHO AWAY INTO THE NIGHT... WHERE SOMEWHERE A *MANIAC* WAITS...WAITS FOR *ME!* I *KNOW* IT! I *FEEL* IT! I'VE *KNOWN IT ALL DAY!*

AND THEN I HEAR FOOTSTEPS COMING *BACK*...BACK OUT OF THE *NIGHT*. I HURRY TO THE DOOR...WAITING...PRAYING IT WILL BE *MRS. PRITCHARD*...

A FIGURE COMES OUT OF THE BLACKNESS. I SEE HIM THROUGH THE GLASS...WIDE-EYED...BREATHLESS. HE COMES UP TO THE LIBRARY DOOR... PEERS IN AT ME... RATTLES THE DOORKNOB...

HE HOLDS UP A BOOK...POINTS TO IT...OPENS THE BACK COVER SO I CAN SEE THAT IT IS DUE TODAY... LOOKS AT ME PLEADINGLY...

I GLANCE AROUND AT THE BIG, HUSHED, LONELY LIBRARY AND THE BLACK HEADLINES ON THE NEWSPAPER RACK. HOW CAN I *KNOW*? HOW CAN I BE *SURE*?..

WHY TAKE A *CHANCE?* IT *COULD BE HIM!* I SHAKE MY HEAD IN THE NEGATIVE. HIS MOUTH WORKS, FORMING INVECTIVES...

HE'S INSISTANT. HE RATTLES THE KNOB...RAPS ON THE DOOR GLASS... GLARES AT ME...

I GLANCE UP AT THE SHADE, SHIVERING; I REACH UP AND PULL IT DOWN, SHUTTING OUT HIS GLARING EYES... HIS ANGRY FACE...

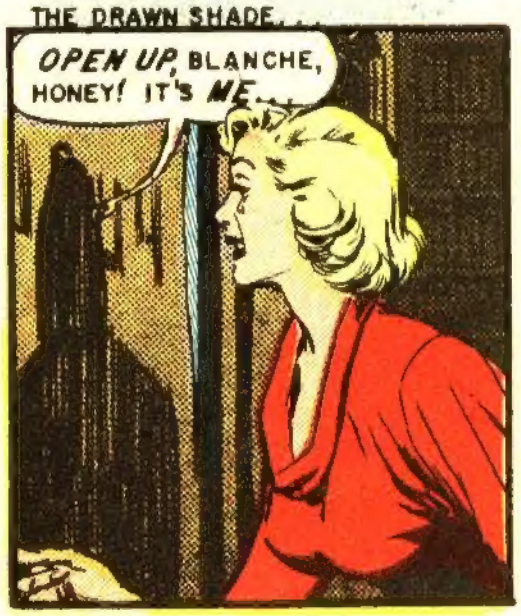
I BACK AWAY, MY HEART THROBBING. FOR A LONG WHILE THE KNOB-RATTLING AND GLASS-RAPPING CONTINUES...

THEN IT STOPS. HIS FOOTSTEPS FACE OFF INTO THE NIGHT... THE NIGHT THAT SHROUDS THE *MANIAC* WHO *WAITS* FOR ME. I PULL BACK THE SHADE AND PEER OUT...

MRS. PRITCHARD IS COMING! I CAN SEE HER PLODDING WEARILY TOWARDS THE LIBRARY, CRADLING THE BAG OF COFFEE AND SANDWICHES...

I LEAN BACK AGAINST THE DOOR, SOBBING...

THE DOORKNOB TURNS. MRS. PRITCHARD'S SOOTHING VOICE DRIFTS IN THROUGH THE GLASS AND THE DRAWN SHADE...



I LIFT THE SHADE AND FLING OPEN THE DOOR...

MRS. PRITCHARD COMES IN, GRINNING.

WHAT *IS* IT, CHILD! YOUR *EYES* ARE *FILLED WITH TEARS!*

OH, MRS. PRITCHARD! I WAS *SO FRIGHTENED!*

SHE SETS DOWN THE BAG, LIFTS OUT THE CONTAINERS OF COFFEE AND THE WAXED-PAPER-WRAPPED SANDWICHES...

FRIGHTENED, HONEY? *OF WHAT?*

THE *MANIAC,* MRS. PRITCHARD! THE *CRAZY MURDERER* THAT'S KILLED THOSE *SEVEN PEOPLE...*

MRS. PRITCHARD HESITATES... HER SMILE VANISHING...

WHY SHOULD YOU BE *FRIGHTENED,* HONEY? *YOU'RE* PERFECTLY *SAFE... HERE... WITH ME!*

I KNOW! BUT THAT *MAN* YOU LEFT ME WITH WHEN YOU WENT AWAY...

HE LOOKED AT ME SO *FUNNY!* HIS *EYES!* THE WAY HE *WALKED!* I WAS *SURE* IT WAS *HIM!*

YOU MEAN *MR. FEELEY?* WHY *HE'S* HERE *EVERY NIGHT!* HE'S *PERFECTLY HARMLESS!*

HE WANTED TO *STAY* TILL YOU GOT *BACK!* THE WAY HE *LOOKED* AT ME, I... I...

MR. *FEELEY!?* DON'T BE *SILLY!* HE'S A *GENTLEMAN!*

...AND THAT *OTHER* ONE... THE ONE WHO *CAME* AFTER MR. FEELEY *LEFT.* HE WANTED ME TO *OPEN THE DOOR* FOR HIM, I WOULDN'T *DO* IT! HE RATTLED THE *KNOB* AND HAMMERED ON THE *WINDOW!* HIS *BOOK* WAS *DUE* TODAY, AND HE WAS *FIFTEEN MINUTES LATE...*

OH DEAR! I *FORGOT!* TODAY IS *THURSDAY!* THAT WAS *MR. GARVIN!* HE *WORKS* TILL *NINE...*

I *ALWAYS* MAKE AN *EXCEPTION* FOR *MR. GARVIN!*

HOW WAS I TO KNOW *HE* WASN'T THE MANIAC?

MRS. PRITCHARD TURNS TO ME, HANDING ME MY COFFEE. HER FACE IS GRIM...

WHAT MAKES YOU *THINK* THE *MANIAC* IS A *MAN?*

HUH?

SHE GLANCES AT THE DOOR...

I SAID, "*WHAT* MAKES YOU *THINK* THE *MANIAC* IS A *MAN?*" YOU KNOW... IT *COULD* BE A *WOMAN!*

I... I...

THEN MRS. PRITCHARD DOES A *STRANGE THING*. SHE GOES TO THE DOOR AND *PULLS DOWN THE SHADE AGAIN* AND SOMEWHERE, DEEP INSIDE ME, THAT FEELING STARTS ONCE MORE...THAT GNAWING, FRIGHTENING FEELING...

YOU SEE, BLANCHE...*I* HAPPEN TO THINK THE *MANIAC* IS A *WOMAN!*

YOU...YOU *DO?!*

...THAT SAME GNAWING FRIGHTENING TERROR I FELT EVER SINCE I CAME TO WORK THIS MORNING AND MRS. PRITCHARD GREETED ME AND...

THERE ARE MANY *REASONS* FOR ME THINKING SO... MANY *DETAILS* ABOUT THE *MURDERS* SHE'S COMMITTED!

LIKE-LIKE *WHAT?*

MRS. PRITCHARD! IT WAS *SHE* WHO FIRST IGNITED THE SPARK IN ME, THAT FLAMED UP INTO THAT BURNING FEAR THAT *I* WOULD BE THE MANIAC'S *EIGHTH VICTIM!* IT WAS *SHE* WHO *DID IT!*

...LIKE ALL OF HER *VICTIMS* BEING *MEN!* DON'T YOU THINK IT'S *STRANGE* THAT *ALL* OF THE *SEVEN VICTIMS* WERE *MEN?*

I... I HADN'T *THOUGHT...*

MRS. PRITCHARD! OF COURSE! HOW *STUPID* OF ME NOT TO HAVE *REALIZED* IT!

WOULDN'T IT BE *CLEVER* OF THE MANIAC TO *SWITCH NOW*... TO THROW THE POLICE *OFF*... TO PICK ON A *FEMALE VICTIM?*

WHAT ARE YOU *SAYING?!*

NO WONDER SHE WAS SO GLAD TO SEE ME!

OH, *NOTHING!* IT'S JUST A *THEORY* OF MINE. *COME!* DRINK YOUR *COFFEE!* WE HAVE *WORK*...

NO!

NO WONDER SHE WANTED TO WORK LATE TONIGHT!

DRINK YOUR *COFFEE*, BLANCHE! YOU...YOU... WHAT *IS* IT?

YOU *POISONED* THE COFFEE... *DIDN'T YOU?*

NO WONDER SHE PULLED THE SHADE!

POISONED ... THE...COFFEE!? WHY WOULD I DO *THAT?*

ALL DAY LONG I'VE HAD A *FEELING...*

AND ALL THE TIME I THOUGHT THE MANIAC WAS A MAN!

WHAT *KIND* OF A FEELING!

...A *FEELING* THAT *I WOULD BE MURDERED TONIGHT!*

MRS. PRITCHARD! SHE'S THE MANIAC!

BLANCHE! ARE YOU SAYING THAT *I..?*

KEEP AWAY FROM ME!

SHE COMES TOWARD ME, HER MILKY EYES STARING AT ME, HER WRINKLED, MANIAC'S FACE WORKING...

SHE'S GOING TO *KILL* ME! I *KNOW* IT! I'VE *KNOWN* IT! I'VE GOT TO *PROTECT* MYSELF!

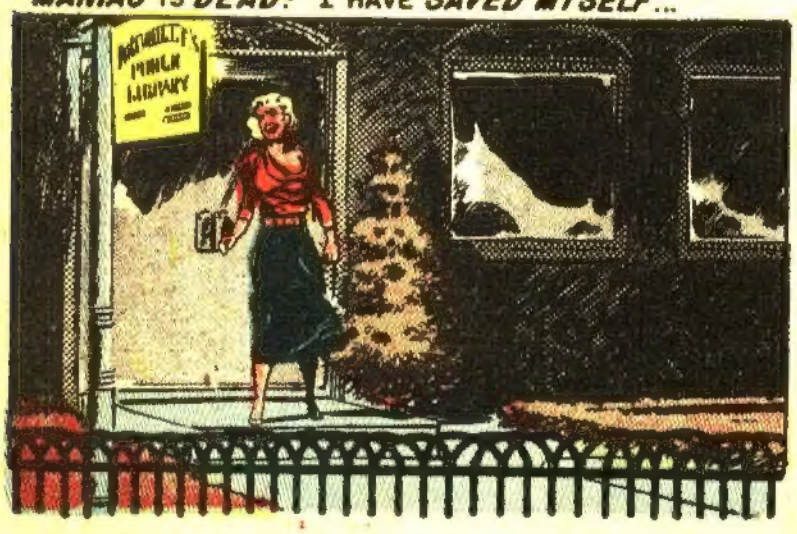
I'VE GOT TO KILL HER BEFORE SHE KILLS ME!

SUDDENLY, THE FEAR IS GONE! I'M *STRONG!* I *FEEL* STRONG. I CLOSE MY STRONG FINGERS AROUND THE MANIAC'S *THROAT*...

...AND I *SQUEEZE!* I SQUEEZE THE *LIFE* FROM THE MANIAC'S WRITHING THRASHING *BODY*...

...AND THEN I LET THE MANIAC'S LIFELESS FORM *SLIP* FROM MY STRONG FINGERS AND *COLLAPSE,* LIKE A PILE OF OLD RAGS, ON THE LIBRARY FLOOR...

I TURN AND STEP OUT OF THE LIBRARY DOOR... OUT INTO THE NIGHT. THAT *GNAWING FEAR* IS *GONE*... THAT HORRIBLE FEELING THAT *I* WAS TO BE THE *MANIAC'S EIGHTH VICTIM* IS *PURGED* FROM MY *TORTURED MIND. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE NOW!* THE *MANIAC* IS *DEAD!* I HAVE *SAVED MYSELF*...



I WALK DOWN THE DARK EMPTY STREETS... FEELING SAFE... FEELING SECURE. *ONCE AGAIN* I HAVE SAVED MYSELF FROM BECOMING THE MANIAC'S VICTIM... AS I HAD SAVED MYSELF *SEVEN TIMES BEFORE TONIGHT*... BY *KILLING* THE MANIAC BEFORE IT COULD *KILL ME*...

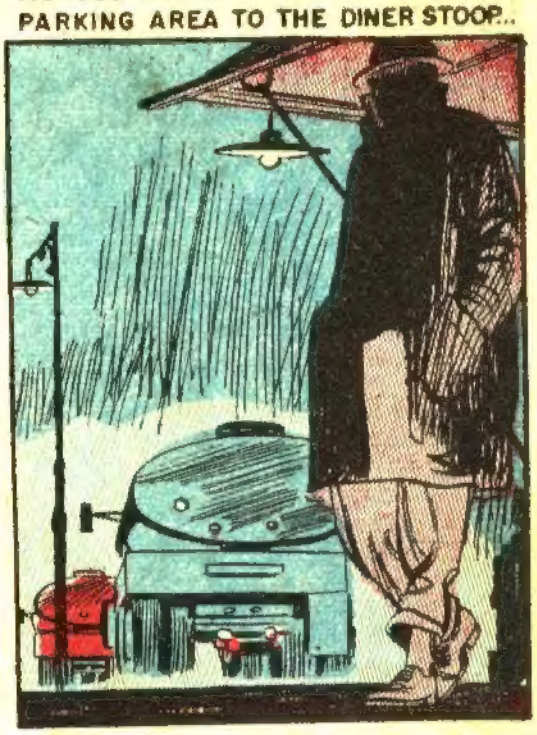
THE END

JUST HER SPEED

ED STOOD IN THE MIDNIGHT DARKNESS OUTSIDE THE DINER, TREMBLING WITH HATE AND ANGER AND THAT INSANE DESIRE FOR REVENGE THAT HAD BECOME ALMOST AN OBSESSION WITH HIM OVER THE TWO YEARS THAT HE HAD SEARCHED FOR MARTY. . .

HE WATCHED AS THE TWO TRUCK DRIVERS AT THE COUNTER FINISHED THEIR COFFEE, PUSHED AWAY THEIR CUPS, AND ROSE WEARILY TO THEIR FEET. . . HE WATCHED THE MAN BEHIND THE COUNTER SMILE AND NOD GOOD-BYE. AND HE FINGERED THE COLD STEEL OF THE .45 IN HIS COAT POCKET. . .

HE WAITED UNTIL THEIR TRUCKS HAD GROWLED TO THE ROAD AND ROARED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT. THEN HE STEPPED FROM THE SHADOWS AND MOVED ACROSS THE CRUNCHING GRAVEL PARKING AREA TO THE DINER STOOP. .



IT WAS *MARTY*, ALL RIGHT! HE'D *KNOW* THAT FACE *ANYWHERE!* HE'D LOOKED INTO A *MILLION* OTHER FACES THESE PAST TWO YEARS SEARCHING FOR IT AND NOW HE'D *FOUND* IT. HE MOUNTED THE STEPS HEAVILY, AND FLUNG OPEN THE DINER DOOR. . .

MARTY TURNED SLOWLY. . . SMILING. . . ABSENTLY WIPING THE CUP HE'D JUST WASHED. THE SMILE FROZE ON HIS TIRED FACE. THE CUP SLIPPED TO THE FLOOR-RACK AND SHATTERED IN A BRITTLE SCREAM. . .

THE GUN CAME OUT OF HIS POCKET LIKE A BLACK PANTHER SPRINGING FROM ITS CAVE. MARTY TURNED WHITE, BACKING OFF. . . MUMBLING. . . STUTTERING. . .

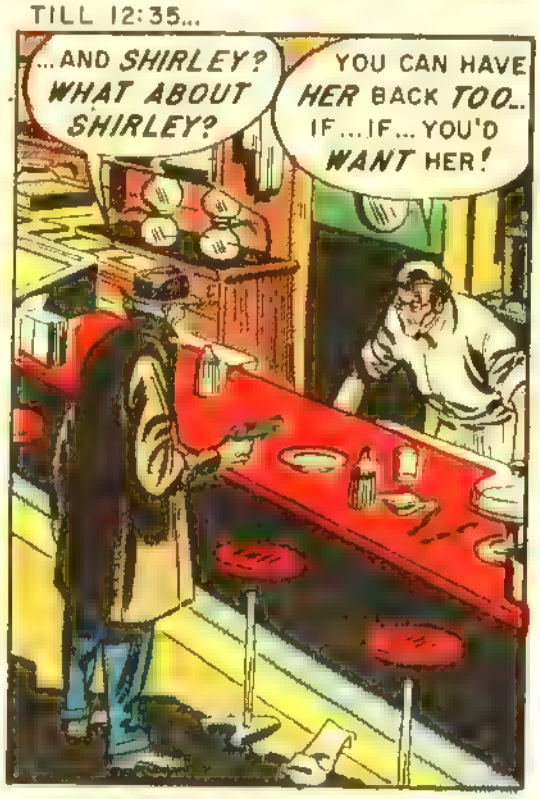
MARTY SHOT A QUICK GLANCE AT THE WALL CLOCK OVER THE JUKE BOX...

I BEEN *LOOKIN'* FOR YOU, MARTY! FOR *TWO YEARS* I BEEN LOOKIN' FOR *YOU*... AND *SHIRLEY!*
P-PUT AWAY THE *GUN*, ED! YOU DON'T *KILL* A GUY BECAUSE HE *TOOK AWAY YOUR GIRL!*

12:09! IN 26 MINUTES, CLANCEY WOULD BE BY! CLANCEY THE STATE TROOPER... ZOOMING UP ON HIS BIKE LIKE HE ALWAYS DOES AT 12:35 ON THE DOT FOR A CUP OF JAVA AND TWO SINKERS...

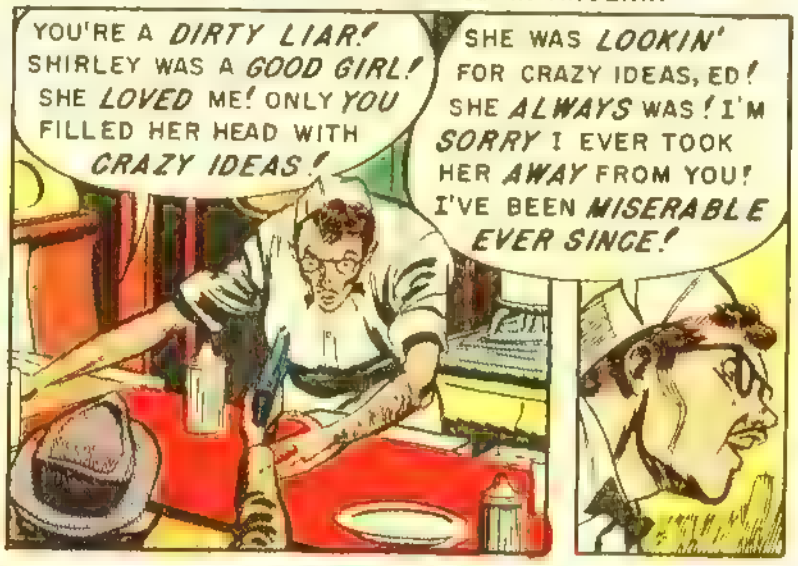
I DO, MARTY! *I* KILL A GUY 'CAUSE HE TOOK AWAY MY *GIRL... AND ALL MY DOUGH!*
LOOK, ED! I GOT A COUPLE HUNDRED IN THE *BANK!* I'LL *GIVE* IT TO YOU! I'LL *PAY YOU BACK EVERY CENT... A LITTLE EACH WEEK...*

IF HE COULD ONLY *STALL* ED... KEEP HIM *TALKING*... MAKE HIM *PUT OFF* SQUEEZING THAT TRIGGER TILL 12:35...



IT WAS MARTY'S *ONLY CHANCE! STALL! STALL* TILL CLANCEY COULD GET THERE AND *SAVE* HIM FROM *KILL-CRAZY, REVENGEFUL ED*...

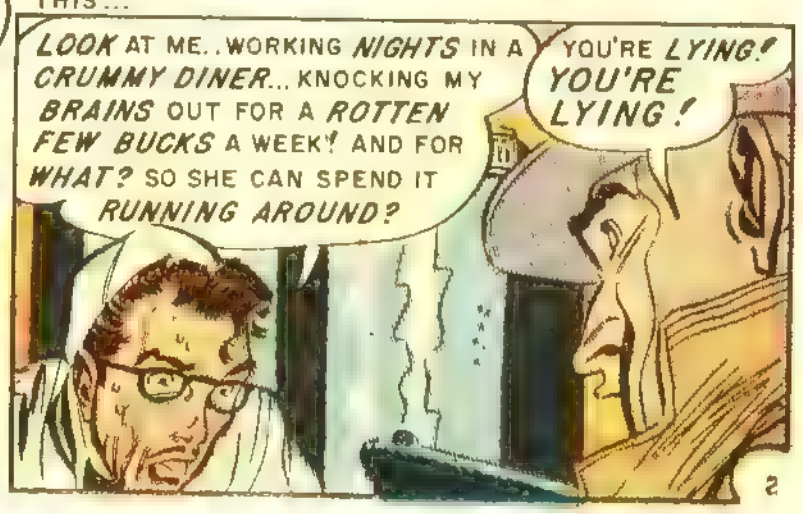
ED'S KNUCKLES WHITENED AS HE GRIPPED THE GUN-BUTT TIGHTER. HIS EYES BLAZED IN ANGER...


YOU'RE A *DIRTY LIAR!* SHIRLEY WAS A *GOOD GIRL!* SHE *LOVED* ME! ONLY *YOU* FILLED HER HEAD WITH *CRAZY IDEAS!*
SHE WAS *LOOKIN'* FOR CRAZY IDEAS, ED! SHE *ALWAYS* WAS! I'M *SORRY* I EVER TOOK HER *AWAY* FROM YOU! I'VE BEEN *MISERABLE EVER SINCE!*

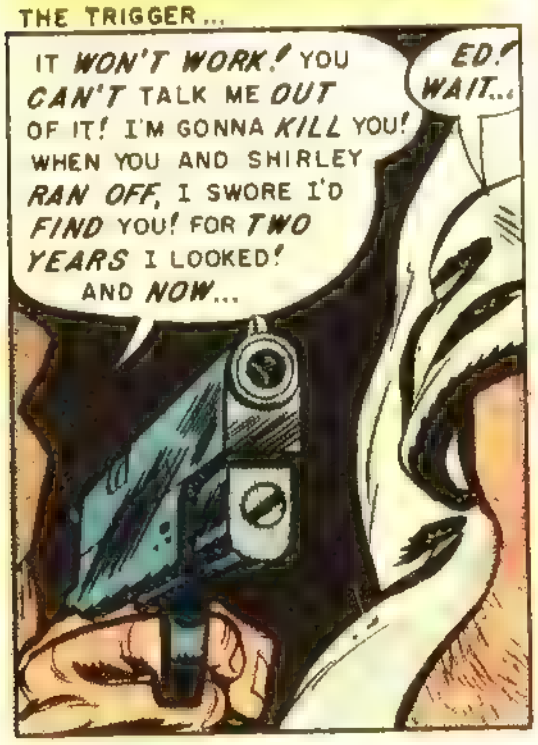
ED'S VOICE WAS ALMOST MANIACAL AS HE SCREAMED AT MARTY...

YOU'VE BEEN MISERABLE! WHAT ABOUT *ME? I LOVED HER!* I WAS GONNA *MARRY* HER!
YOU WOULD'VE BEEN *SORRY*, ED- LIKE *I'M* SORRY... *SORRY I EVER MARRIED HER! LOOK* AT ME...

MARTY WAVED HIS ARMS AROUND, GLANCING AGAIN AT THE CLOCK. 12:14! CRIPES! ONLY FIVE MINUTES WASTED! 21 MINUTES TO GO. HE HAD TO GO ON WITH THIS...


LOOK AT ME.. WORKING *NIGHTS* IN A *CRUMMY DINER*... KNOCKING MY *BRAINS* OUT FOR A *ROTTEN FEW BUCKS* A WEEK! AND FOR *WHAT?* SO SHE CAN SPEND IT *RUNNING AROUND?*
YOU'RE *LYING!* *YOU'RE LYING!*

ED LEVELED THE GUN AT MARTY'S CHEST... HIS FINGER TIGHTENING ON THE TRIGGER...


IT *WON'T WORK!* YOU *CAN'T* TALK ME *OUT* OF IT! I'M GONNA *KILL* YOU! WHEN YOU AND SHIRLEY *RAN OFF*, I SWORE I'D *FIND* YOU! FOR *TWO YEARS* I LOOKED! AND *NOW*...
ED! WAIT...

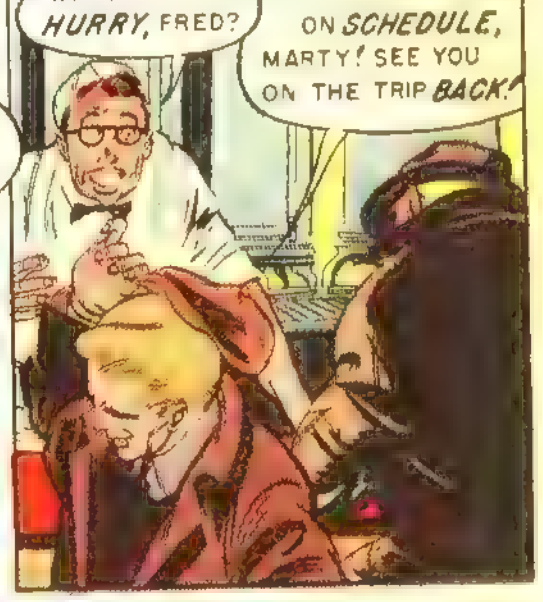
A TRUCK RUMBLED INTO THE DINER PARKING AREA OFF THE MAIN ROAD. MARTY BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF. ED LOOKED AROUND, FURIOUS AT THE INTRUSION...

ED LOWERED THE GUN SO THAT THE MUZZLE RESTED ON THE COUNTER...

THE TRUCK DRIVER SLAMMED INTO THE DINER, GRINNING. MARTY FELT THE COLD SWEAT RUNNING DOWN HIS FLUSHED FACE...

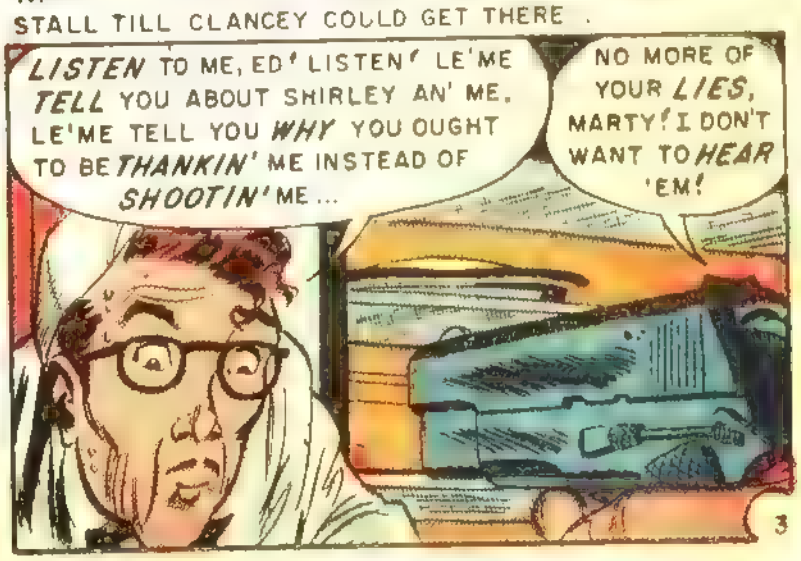
THE TRUCK DRIVER CHATTED AIMLESSLY AS HE SWIGGED HIS COFFEE. BUT MARTY WASN'T LISTENING. HE KEPT GLANCING AT THE WALL-CLOCK AND THEN AT THE BLACK MOUTH OF THE .45 POINTING AT HIM FROM THE COUNTER-EDGE...

ALL TOO SOON, THE CUSTOMER GOT UP, SLID A QUARTER AT MARTY, AND TURNED TO GO



MARTY'S HEART SANK AS THE DOOR SWUNG SHUT AND THE TRUCK LABORED OUT ONTO THE HIGHWAY AND SPED OFF INTO THE NIGHT. HE SHOT A LOOK AT THE CLOCK. ED LIFTED THE GUN...

MARTY STAMMERED. THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY! STALL! STALL TILL CLANCEY COULD GET THERE.


LISTEN TO ME, ED! LISTEN! LE'ME *TELL* YOU ABOUT SHIRLEY AN' ME. LE'ME TELL YOU *WHY* YOU OUGHT TO BE *THANKIN'* ME INSTEAD OF *SHOOTIN'* ME...
NO MORE OF YOUR *LIES*, MARTY! I DON'T WANT TO *HEAR* 'EM!

MARTY PLEADED...COUNTING THE SECONDS

THEY *AIN'T LIES*, ED! THEY'RE THE *TRUTH!* SHE'S *NO GOOD!* WHOSE IDEA *WAS* IT TO TAKE *YOUR DOUGH*, TOO? *NOT* MINE! *HERS!* ALL *HER* IDEA!
YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE ME *BELIEVE* THAT?

TWENTY SECONDS..

YOU'VE *GOT* TO! *YOU* KNOW *SHIRLEY!* YOU KNOW HOW *PRETTY* SHE IS. ANY GUY *SEES* HER... *FALLS* FOR HER. *I* DID WHEN YOU *INTRODUCED* US! I COULDN'T *HELP* IT! AND SHE *KNEW!*
SO DID *I*, MARTY! ONLY I *TRUSTED* YOU! YOU WERE MY *FRIEND!*

FORTY...

SHE WAS *THROUGH* WITH YOU, ED... *TIRED* OF YOU! SHE *TOLD* ME SO! THEN, SHE TOLD ME ABOUT THE *DOUGH* SHE WAS HOLDING FOR YOU...
WE WERE GONNA GET *MARRIED* ON THAT DOUGH!

ONE MINUTE..

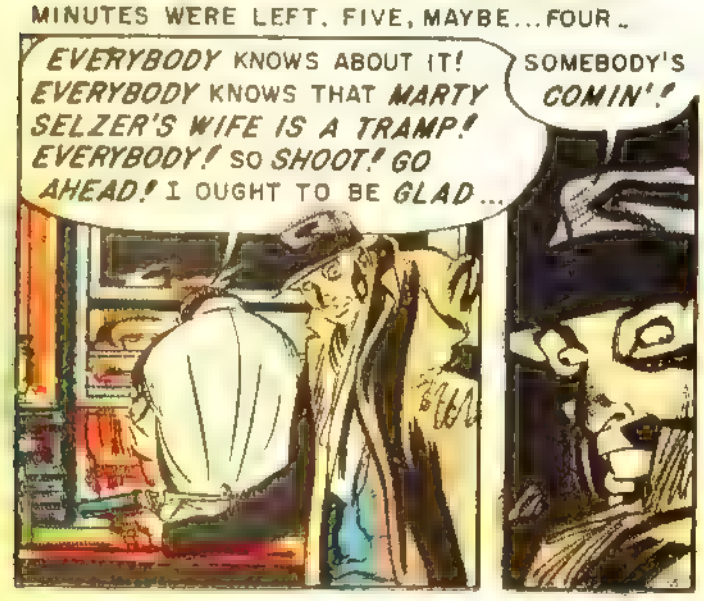
SHE SAID WE COULD HAVE A *GOOD TIME* ON THAT DOUGH! *SHE* SUGGESTED WE *RUN AWAY*... SOMEPLACE WHERE YOU COULD NEVER *FIND* US..AND GET *MARRIED*...AND *SPEND IT*...
SHUT UP! SHUT UP! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR NO MORE! TURN AROUND! TAKE YOUR MEDICINE!

TWO MINUTES GONE... SIX MINUTES LEFT...

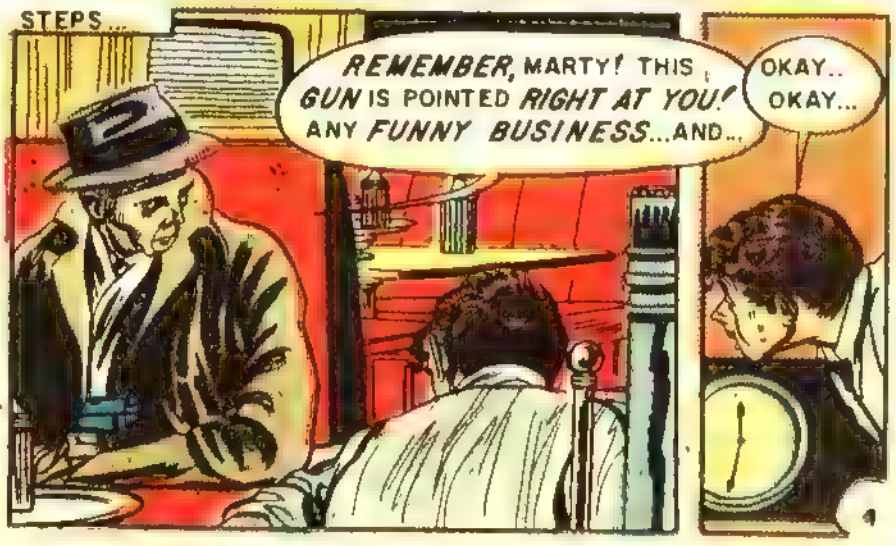
MARTY FACED THE CAKE RACKS.. STILL TALKING...STALLING... STALLING...

SHE STARTED *RUNNIN' AROUND*... *HERE*...IN *THIS TOWN*...WITH *ANY* FELLER THAT WOULD GIVE HER A *GOOD TIME!* BEIN' *MARRIED* DIDN'T MATTER TO HER! *NOT AT ALL!*

MARTY WAS TALKING FAST NOW. AND PRAYING. HE WONDERED WHAT TIME IT WAS...HOW MANY MINUTES WERE LEFT. FIVE, MAYBE...FOUR..


EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT IT! *EVERYBODY* KNOWS THAT *MARTY SELZER'S WIFE IS A TRAMP! EVERYBODY!* SO *SHOOT! GO AHEAD!* I OUGHT TO BE *GLAD*...
SOMEBODY'S *COMIN'!*

MARTY SPUN AROUND. IT WAS 12:31. A CUSTOMER WOULD WASTE THE REMAINING TIME TILL CLANCEY COULD GET THERE ON HIS BIKE WITH HIS GUN. ED CURSED AS THE MAN CRUNCHED ACROSS THE GRAVEL AREA AND MOUNTED THE STEPS...



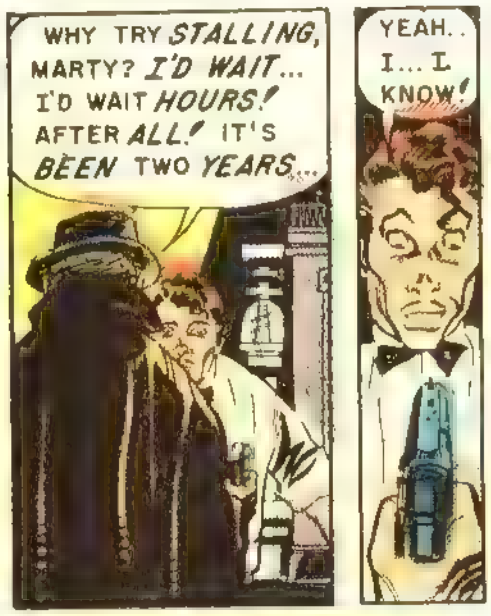
THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN. THE MAN STEPPED IN...

MARTY POINTED TO THE BOOTH. THE MAN STEPPED IN. ED SCOWLED, THE GUN MUZZLE RESTING ON THE COUNTER. MARTY PRAYED...

THE CALL WAS SHORT. THE MAN STEPPED OUT..

MARTY SENSED ED'S FURY...SAW THE GUN MUZZLE COME UP, THREATENING...

THE MAN SHRUGGED AND STEPPED OUT INTO THE NIGHT. ED STOOD UP... SNEERING..

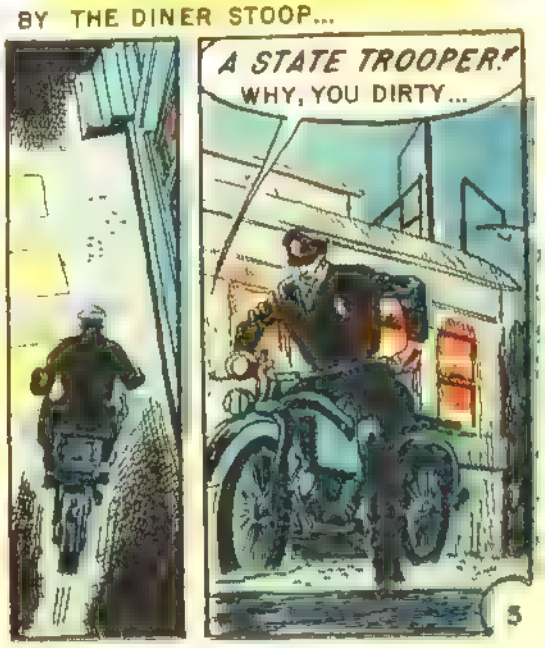


MARTY LOOKED AT THE WALL CLOCK! 12:34! ONE MINUTE...ONE SHORT MINUTE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH..

WHAT GAME? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THOSE LIES ABOUT SHIRLEY? WHAT ARE YOU STALLING FOR? EXPECTING SOMEBODY? YOU KEEP LOOKING AT THE CLOCK...

THE HUM CAME FROM FAR OFF... LIKE A BEE... DRONING CLOSER... IT WAS CLANCEY... RIGHT ON TIME!

THE MOTORCYCLE SKIDDED ACROSS THE GRAVEL AND CAME TO A STOP BY THE DINER STOOP...



ED CURSED SAVAGELY...

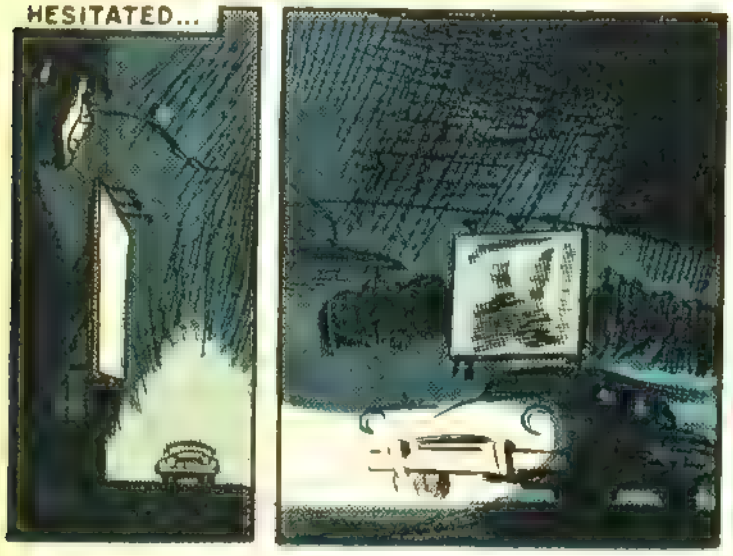
THE TROOPER KICKED DOWN THE STAND AND STARTED TOWARD THE DINER STEPS...

THOSE THINGS YOU SAID... ABOUT SHIRLEY! YOU DID LIE!
SHIRLEY?! THE BEST DARN WIFE A GUY EVER HAD. KNOW WHAT SHE DOES WHEN I'M WORKIN' NIGHTS? RED CROSS WORK! CHARITY! SHE'S ALWAYS BUSY!

THE STATE TROOPER WAS ON YOUR TOP STEP... REACHING FOR THE DOOR...

I GOT WHAT I WANTED, ED... YOUR GIRL AND YOUR DOUGH! SHE FELL FOR MY LINE! SHIRLEY FELL HARD!
I'LL KILL YOU ANYWAY! I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME! I'LL...

SUDDENLY... FROM OUT ON THE HIGHWAY... CAME A SWOOSHING ROAR AND A BLUE STREAK FLASHED ACROSS THE CONCRETE. THE STATE TROOPER HESITATED...



...THEN LEAPED FROM THE STOOP... KICKED HIS BIKE AROUND...

...AND TORE OUT OF THE DINER LOT... AFTER THE SPEEDER...

ED GRINNED AS HE SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER AND SENT FIVE BULLETS INTO MARTY SELZER'S TWITCHING BODY...

THEN, HE WALKED OUT OF THE DINER...

WHILE FAR UP THE ROAD, THE COUPLE IN THE CAR SAT EMBARRASSED AS THE TROOPER WROTE OUT A TICKET...

YOU... YOU WON'T TELL MY... MY HUSBAND ABOUT THIS... ER... WILL YOU, CLANCEY? HE... HE THINKS I'M AT THE RED CROSS!
YOUR PRIVATE LIFE IS YOUR OWN AFFAIR, MRS. SELZER! I NEVER TOLD HIM ABOUT THE OTHERS, DID I?
THE END

A COLLECTOR'S E.C. CHECK-LIST

Due to frequent requests from avid collectors of E.C. type literature, we are herewith publishing a complete check-list of E.C.'s "New Trend" crime and horror mags.

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

No. 17—Apr.-May, 1950 No. 18—Jun.-Jul., 1950
No. 19—Aug.-Sept., 1950

(title change to)

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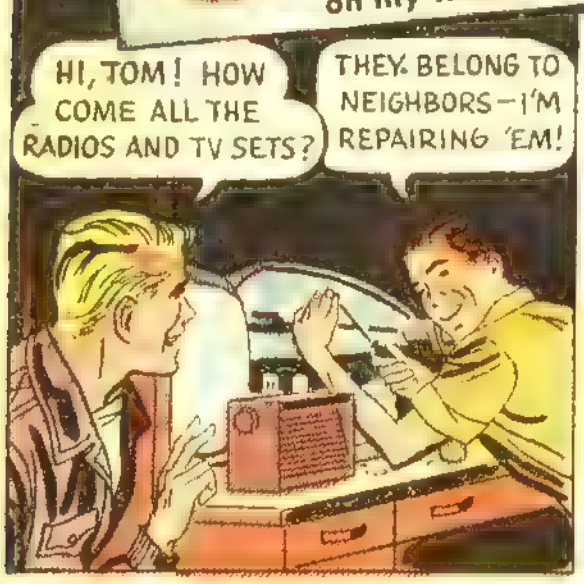

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HORROR HOBBY

Look in that windpw. You see a thin, meek-looking man with a bald head, a bachelor sitting alone, enjoying his all-absorbing hobby—home movies. In the darkened room, he chuckles at the screen and its sound track. Henry Blake has an expensive sound projector and sound camera too.

What is he amused over? Funny scenes of some kind? Take a look—if you have the *courage*. Ah, you gasp. On the screen you see a man's face livid with fear, as a deadly cobra weaves to strike at him. You hear the sound track now, of his screams at facing fanged death.

You turn away sickened, but Henry Blake chuckles. He enjoys it. Harmless? Appearances can be so deceiving. Now you know that Henry is a beast within, a vicious sadist, delighting in stark human terror.

Henry's hobby, you see, is *horror*.

How does Henry get these sinister scenes? Are they mere sham movie takes from chiller films which he buys? No, they are *real*, arranged by Henry himself on unsuspecting victims. For instance, he crept in that man's home, let the cobra loose at him from a basket, then took the movies of his terror-stricken panic.

But Henry doesn't let his victims die. No, that would be stupid, letting himself open to murder charges and a police dragnet. After the man fainted in fright, Henry shot the cobra himself, leaving the man alive with his nightmares to come. And unable to ever identify Henry, for he always wore a mask.

Henry chuckled at his fear films, each more unique. A man shoved under the wheels of a truck by Henry, but with the camera set to take automatic scenes, leaving Henry free himself to save him at the last moment. And that woman trapped in her burning automobile . . . a man locked in a cage with a hungry tiger . . . another with the blade of a home-made guillotine crunching down and stopping only an inch above his neck.

Human horror, all his on film. Henry chuckled more, especially thinking of his latest fiendish deathtrap, to be sprung tonight. Mask on, camera in hand, he went forth. He avoided late strollers. Once, hearing a puzzling clink while pausing to light a cigarette he hid in shadow, but no one went by. He shrugged, went on to the rumble-down deserted house, into its dank cobwebby basement, to check it all once more. Under flood-lamps, which he had previously set up with batteries, he turned on the apparatus and heard the whines and jerks. Leaving it on for focusing, he set up the camera and tripod meticulously, and set it for automatic filming. Finally, he tested the chain and manacle in the stone wall, snapping it shut on his own wrist to make sure he had installed it firmly, so the victim couldn't pull loose.

Now he could lurk outside in shadow till his victim came along—any victim, it didn't matter, just so Henry could silently leap behind and thrust the chloroform-soaked cloth in his nose. Then it would be simple to drag the limp form here, manacle him to the wall, revive him with water in his face, and record his terror at what whistled at him through the air.

Satisfied, Henry reached in his pocket for the manacle's key. Henry gasped. It was gone. And now Henry remembered that clink, as he pulled out his cigarette pack—it had been the key dropping. It was outside, out of reach.

Henry struggled but couldn't slip his wrist out of the iron band . . . he couldn't yank the chain loose from the stone wall . . . he could only shudder against the wall and turn his horrified eyes to watch the sharp spear whistle straight at him, through the air. Then the length of chain jerked it back, just before it struck him. The automatic battery-operated device then wound up the chain to which the spear was attached and again catapulted it at Henry . . . and again . . . and *again* . . .

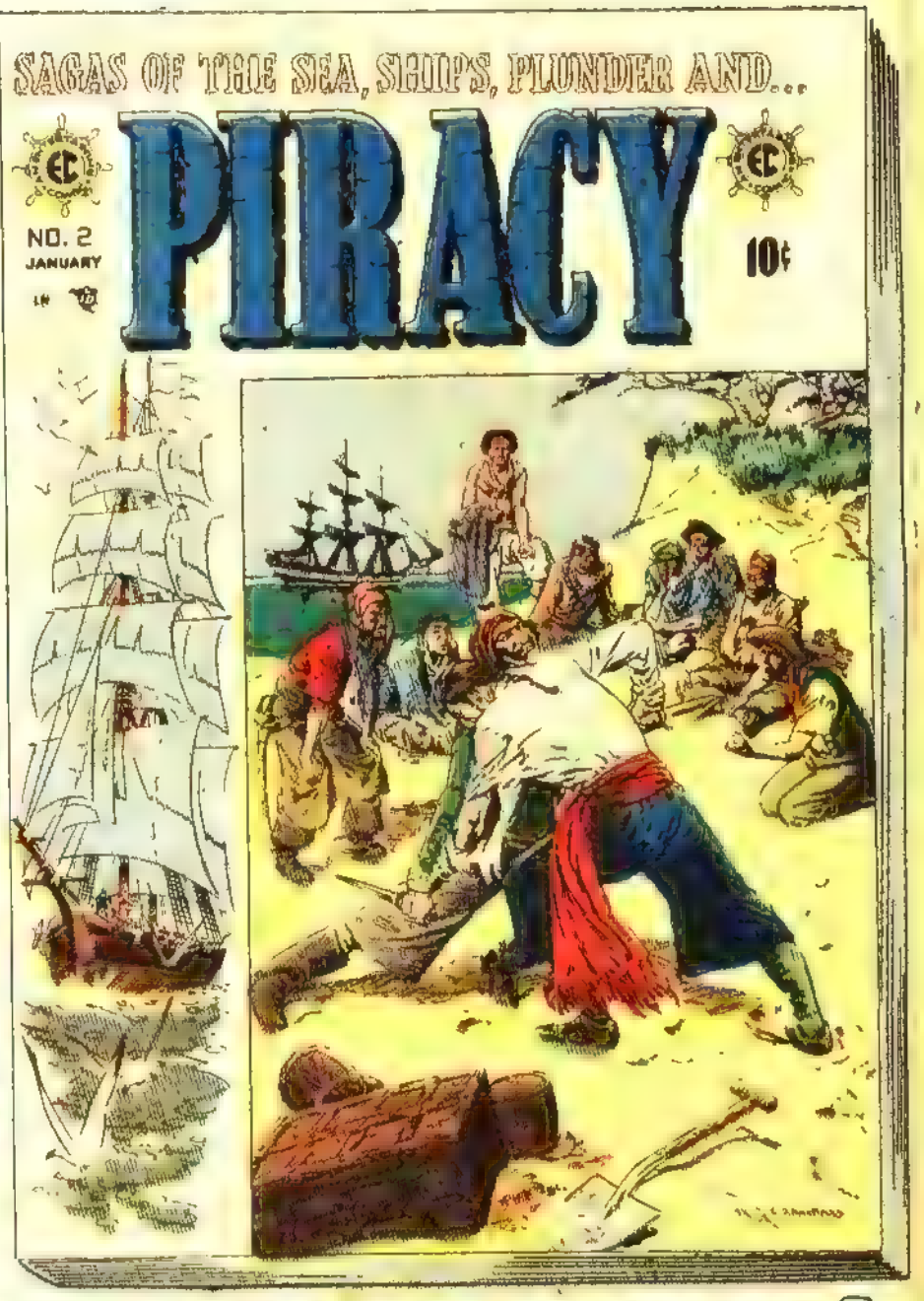
Henry screeched but no one would hear from the muffling basement.

How many deaths would Henry die in advance, before the chain finally weakened and snapped, letting the spear plunge into his vitals?

When would the chain break? When? . . . *when?* . . . WHEN?

Rather a pity, isn't it, that there's no one there to turn on the movie camera for the *best* item in his horror hobby?

WE KNOW YOU'LL ENJOY THE LUSTY, SWASHBUCKLING ADVENTURES IN OUR NEW SEAGOING MAG! "PIRACY" IS A TREASURE CHEST OF SALTY SEA YARNS PRESENTED IN THE E.C. TRADITION!



SO SAIL DOWN TO YOUR *LOCAL NEWSSTAND*, MATES... DO A LITTLE *EXPLORING* THROUGH THE *REST OF THE BILGE*... AND *COMMANDEER* YOUR COPY. IF YOU'RE *NOT* THE OUTDOOR TYPE AND WOULD RATHER *IMPORT* "PIRACY", YOU CAN *SUBSCRIBE!* JUST FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SHIP OFF, TOGETHER WITH *ONE HUNDRED PIECES OF CENT* (THAT'S *ONE BUCK*, LANDLUBBERS!) TO:

THE SEASICK EDITORS OF
PIRACY
ROOM 706
225 LAFAYETTE STREET
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

OKAY, YOU FO'C'SLE RATS! I'M SHANGHAIED! HERE'S $1.00 FOR THE NEXT EIGHT ISSUES OF *PIRACY!*

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WHERE THERE'S SMOKE...

YOU *SAID* YOU'D FIX THAT LEAKY BATHROOM FAUCET, ED. YOU SAID YOU'D DO IT *AFTER DINNER*. WELL, *IT'S AFTER DINNER!* WHAT ARE YOU *WAITING* FOR? WHEN I ASK...

SO CAN'T I *RELAX* FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES? I'M *TIRED*, MAE. BELIEVE ME, RUNNING THAT SHOP ISN'T *EASY!*

FOR *TWENTY-THREE YEARS*, IT'S BEEN LIKE THIS, *HASN'T* IT, ED? YOU PUT IN A *HARD DAY* AND ALL YOU ASK IS A LITTLE TIME TO *READ*... TO *THINK*... TO *SIT QUIET* AND *DREAM*. A MAN IS *ENTITLED* TO THAT MUCH, *ISN'T* HE? A MAN *NEEDS* TIME TO *DREAM*. BUT YOU'LL *DO* AS MAE ASKS... BECAUSE IT'S *EASIER* THAT WAY... EASIER THAN *WHINING* AND *COMPLAINING*. YOU'LL DO IT, BUT *DEEP INSIDE YOU*... WITHOUT *KNOWING* IT, EVEN... YOU'LL *ADD A LITTLE MORE HATE TO THAT HATE YOU'VE BEEN STORING UP FOR SO LONG!*

AND SO YOU GET UP WITH A SIGH AND WADDLE WEARILY PAST THE KITCHEN, CASTING A BRIEF, RESENTFUL GLANCE AT YOUR TIRESOME SHREWISH WIFE...

SO RUNNING A *SHOP* ISN'T *EASY!* MAYBE YOU THINK I *LIKE* STANDING HERE DOING *DISHES* AFTER A LONG DAY OF *COOKING* AND *CLEANING* AND *SHOPPING!*

OKAY, MAE! OKAY!

LATER, YOU AND YOUR WIFE SIT IN THE LIVING ROOM AS YOU'VE DONE ALMOST EVERY NIGHT FOR THE PAST TWENTY-THREE YEARS. SHE KNITS AND SHE TALKS AND YOU TRY TO READ... BUT WHO CAN CONCENTRATE WITH THAT ENDLESS WEARISOME CHATTER...

...WELL, *I'D* HEARD JUST ABOUT *ENOUGH*, I SAID," MRS. BOYCE, WHAT THE *ANDERSONS* DO IS THEIR *OWN* BUSINESS." BUT, DO YOU THINK *THAT* SHUT HER UP? IT MOST CERTAINLY DID *NOT!* SHE SAID...

CHATTER...CHATTER. IT GOES ON AND ON...INCESSANTLY. AND YOU HEAR, NOT WHAT MAE IS PRATTLING ABOUT, BUT A GNAWING, BORING, MEANINGLESS DRONE, UNTIL AT LAST YOU FIND REFUGE IN DEEP HYPNOTIC SLEEP...

..SO *I* SAID, "*SURE*, EVE AND WILLIE HAVE THEIR *SCRAPS*, BUT *THEY GET OVER THEM QUICK*, AND ANOTHER THING," I SAID...

SO SOUND ASLEEP, ED, THAT WHEN BEDTIME COMES, MAE HAS TROUBLE AROUSING YOU...

GET UP, ED! IT'S TIME TO GO TO *BED! EVERY NIGHT*, IT'S THE *SAME THING! COME ON NOW*, ED...

UH...MMM... *HUH*...

THEN, STILL IN A SEMI-STUPOR, YOU FEEL YOURSELF BEING LED FROM THE LIVING ROOM BY MAE, HER SOLICITOUS VOICE BARELY PENETRATING YOUR BENUMBED BRAIN...

A *SLEEP* LIKE *THAT*...*SITTING UP*... IS WORSE THAN *NO* SLEEP *AT ALL*, ED! YOU GET *ALL CRAMPED UP!* YOU'LL FEEL *ROTTEN* TOMORROW...

YEAH... SURE... YAWNNN...

BUT TOMORROW COMES AND YOU FEEL *GOOD*, ED GRAHAM... GOOD TO BE AWAY FROM MAE...GOOD TO BE AT YOUR SHOP AGAIN...GOOD TO BE SEEING ALMA BARROWS AGAIN...ALMA ...SO YOUNG...SO FRESH...SO BRIGHT AND PRETTY...

IT MAKES AN OLD MAN *HAPPY* TO SEE A *SMILE* LIKE THAT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, ALMA!

WHAT OLD MAN?! SURELY YOU DON'T THINK *YOU'RE* OLD, MR. GRAHAM.

NO, I GUESS I'M *NOT REALLY OLD*, ALMA. IT'S JUST THAT SOMETIMES I *FEEL* THAT WAY...

I NEVER THINK OF *YOU* AS *OLD*, MR. GRAHAM. I FEEL AS IF I CAN *TALK* TO YOU... WELL... LIKE I TALK TO ANY OF MY *FRIENDS!*

HEARING ALMA TALK LIKE THAT BRINGS THOUGHTS INTO YOUR HEAD, DOESN'T IT, ED? WISTFULLY ABSURD LITTLE THOUGHTS...

SHE'S SO *YOUNG*...WHY, I WAS *PAST TWENTY-FIVE* WHEN *SHE* WAS *BORN*. OF COURSE, *SOME* GIRLS *LIKE* OLDER MEN. WHY, IF I WEREN'T *MARRIED*...I'D...WELL...ALMA *LIKES* ME! I CAN *TELL* SHE DOES!

YES, ED, IT'S A HAPPY WORLD THERE IN YOUR SHOP, WITH ALMA BESIDE YOU, WORKING WITH YOU. BUT AT NIGHT, YOU MUST RETURN TO THAT OTHER WORLD.. THAT WEARISOME, TIRESOME, BORING WORLD WITH YOUR WITHERING, PRATTLING WIFE...

...AND SURE ENOUGH, THE ANDERSONS ARE *TOGETHER AGAIN!* WELL, MRS. BOYCE MADE SUCH A *FOOL* OF HERSELF THIS TIME THAT I JUST *HAD* TO...

AS ALWAYS, YOU DRIFT OFF INTO SLEEP...THAT MERCIFUL VEIL OF BLACK SILENCE THAT SHROUDS ALL OUT... PROTECTING YOUR TORTURED BRAIN FROM MAE'S DRONING... ON ... AND ON ... AND ON ..

... IF I HAD TO *PICK* BETWEEN THE *TWO* OF THEM, BELIEVE ME IT WOULD BE *EVE* ANDERSON. YOU CAN *TRUST* EVE! SHE MAY NOT BE AS *POLISHED*, BUT SHE'S *HONEST* AND...

BUT TONIGHT IS *DIFFERENT*, ED. TONIGHT YOU DREAM A *NIGHTMARE!* OUT OF THE BLACK VEIL OF SILENCE COMES MAE'S BLOOD CURDLING SHRIEK. AND, THEN SHE'S RUNNING TOWARD YOU...SCREAMING... AND SHE'S ON FIRE...

HELP ME! ED! FOR GOD'S SAKE! HELP ME! EEEEEEAAAHHHH...

IT'S SO REAL YOU CAN ALMOST FEEL HER AGONY... YOU CAN ALMOST SMELL HER BURNING FLESH. HER SCREAMS AWAKEN YOU...

MAE! MAE!

ED! WHAT'S THE *MATTER*, ED?

YOU MERELY MUMBLE SOMETHING ABOUT A DREAM AND SHRUG IT OFF. AND NOW, AS MAE RESUMES HER MONOTONOUS MONOLOGUE, YOU THINK TO YOURSELF...

HOW *GOOD* LIFE WOULD BE IF MAE *WERE* TO DIE!

MAE'S VOICE BECOMES A VAGUE WORDLESS HUMMING AS YOU FOCUS YOUR MIND ON THIS NEW THOUGHT...

YES, LIFE *WOULD* BE GOOD WITHOUT HER. I COULD *REALLY* START LIVING. THERE'D BE *OTHER WOMEN!* THERE'D BE *ALMA*... SO *YOUNG*... SO *EXCITING*. LIFE WOULD *BE* EXCITING WITH *ALMA*...

BUT, *MAE*... HOW DO I GET *RID* OF MAE? *FIRE?* MAKE IT LOOK LIKE AN *ACCIDENT?* SURE... BUT *HOW? HOW?*

IT'S JUST AN EMBRYO, ED... NOT YET A FULL-BORN PLAN, THIS DREAM OF YOURS, THIS DREAM OF MURDER. BUT MAE, UNWITTINGLY, SUGGESTS THE FIRST STEP IN YOUR PLAN THE NEXT MORNING, AS YOU ARE ABOUT TO LEAVE FOR THE SHOP...

ED, ON THE WAY *HOME*, BRING ME A *GALLON CAN OF BENZINE*. I WANT TO *CLEAN* THE LIVING ROOM *RUG* TOMORROW...

I'LL TRY TO *REMEMBER*, MAE!

LATER, AT THE SHOP, YOU SEE ALMA BARROWS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. YOU IMAGINE MAE GONE AND ALMA IN HER PLACE. YOUR ALMA. YOUR PRETTY, YOUNG, EXCITING WIFE. AND THE PLAN GROWS...

PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO THINK MAE *SMOKES*. I'LL HAVE TO STOP IN AT FRANK'S *CIGAR STORE*...

"IT'S A CAREFUL PLAN, THIS MURDER DREAM OF YOURS, ED... MATURING FROM AN EMBRYO TO A FULL-FLEDGED SCHEME IN THE WOMB OF YOUR MIND...

CAMFIELDS, MR. GRAHAM? WHEN DID *YOU* SWITCH FROM *STARLINGS*?

OH, THEY'RE *NOT* FOR *ME*, FRANK. THAT'S MY *WIFE'S* BRAND. SHE'S TAKEN TO *SMOKING*. PERSONALLY, I THINK *CAMFIELDS* ARE *RANK WEED*, BUT THAT'S A *WOMAN'S TASTE* FOR YOU!

THE FIRST STEP IS TAKEN, ED. YOU'VE ESTABLISHED THAT MAE SMOKES. YOU THINK OF THE NEXT STEPS ON THE WAY HOME FROM THE SHOP...

I'LL *'FORGET'* TO PICK UP THE BENZINE TONIGHT AND *MAE* WILL HAVE TO GET IT *HERSELF* IN THE MORNING. WITH *HER* MOUTH SHE'S *SURE* TO LET FRED AT THE HARDWARE STORE *KNOW* WHAT SHE WANTS IT FOR...

"THEN, TOMORROW NIGHT, I'LL FISH OUT THE BARBITUATE... THE SLEEPING PILLS I USED TO TAKE... FROM THE MEDICINE CABINET. A FEW TABLETS IN HER COFFEE AT DINNER, AND SHE'LL SLEEP LIKE A LOG. THEN, I'LL CARRY HER INTO THE LIVING ROOM..."

"I'LL GET THE BENZINE, AND I'LL DRENCH MAE WITH IT, AND I'LL SOAK THE RUG..."

"NEXT, I'LL TAKE A CIGARETTE... A CAMFIELD... AND PUT THE REST OF THE PACK IN MAE'S POCKET. THEN, FROM A SAFE DISTANCE, I'LL LIGHT UP..."

"...AND I'LL FLICK THE BURNING BUTT... I'LL SEND IT RIGHT AT MAE, AND SAY..."

NOW, YOU ROTTEN TIRESOME BORE... GOOD-BYE!

"...AND THE KEROSENE WILL BURST IN A SMOKY YELLOW BLAZE..."

"..AND AFTER THE HEAT BECOMES UNBEARABLE, I'LL CLIMB OUT OF THE BEDROOM WINDOW IN MY PAJAMAS AND I'LL CRY..."

FIRE! FIRE!

"...AND THE FIREMEN WILL COME AND PLAY THEIR HOSE ON THE SMOLDERING RUINS WHERE MAE LIES A CHARRED, LIFELESS HULK. AND I'LL PUT ON A SAD, SAD ACT..."

MAE... SOB... MY POOR MAE...

"BEFORE LONG... NOT TOO LONG... I'LL BE ABLE TO TALK TO ALMA..."

DARLING, THE FIRE INSURANCE CHECK CAME TODAY... $14,000! ALMA, WILL YOU...?

MARRY YOU, ED, DEAR? OF COURSE I WILL, SWEETHEART!

"I CAN SEE MYSELF NOW...ON MY HONEYMOON WITH ALMA. I CAN ALMOST FEEL HER WARM YOUNG LIPS..."

I'M YOURS, ED... ALL YOURS...

ALMA... DEAREST...

YOUR DREAM FADES AS YOU REACH YOUR HOUSE, YOUR PLAN IS COMPLETE NOW, READY TO MATERIALIZE. YOUR MIND IS ALIVE WITH IT, LIVING AND RELIVING IT, SO FILLED WITH IT THAT EVEN MAE'S ENDLESS BORING TIRESOME CHATTER CAN'T MAKE YOU SLEEP...

...AND SO I LOOKED AGAIN, AND SURE ENOUGH IT WAS LIZ WHITCOMB. WELL, YOU COULD HAVE KNOCKED ME OVER WITH A FEATHER! SHE'S...

ALMA...OH, ALMA.. I LOVE YOU...

YOUR PLAN REPEATS ITSELF OVER AND OVER THROUGH A SLEEPLESS NIGHT, AND WHEN MORNING COMES, YOU HURRY TO YOUR SHOP, EAGER TO SEE ALMA... TO PASS THE DAY SWIFTLY... TO GET HOME AGAIN...

AFTER TONIGHT, I'LL BE FREE, ALMA! MAE WILL DIE TONIGHT!

BUT ALMA ISN'T ALONE WHEN YOU GET TO THE SHOP, ED, THERE'S A YOUNG FELLOW THERE, A GOOD LOOKING YOUNG FELLOW. AND WHEN THEY SPEAK, THEY *BLOW UP* YOUR BRIGHT LITTLE DREAM... *EXPLODE IT RIGHT IN YOUR FACE*...

JOE SAYS HE *WON'T WAIT*, MR. GRAHAM... AND *I* DON'T WANT TO WAIT *EITHER*. WE'RE *GETTING MARRIED* TODAY. I'M *SURE* YOU CAN FIND *SOMEONE ELSE*...

SOMEONE... CHOKE... SOMEONE *ELSE*...

YOU MUMBLE SOME CONGRATULATORY WORDS AND DAZEDLY WATCH ALMA AND HER HUSBAND-TO-BE LEAVE. SHE'S GONE FROM YOUR LIFE FOREVER, ED. SUDDENLY, YOU FEEL ASHAMED AND FOOLISH...

THAT'S WHAT I AM... AN *OLD FOOL! WHAT* WOULD A PRETTY YOUNG GIRL *WANT* WITH A *MAN OLD ENOUGH TO BE HER FATHER?* WHY... I...I OUGHT TO BE *TICKLED* TO HAVE A WIFE LIKE MAE! MAE... *MAE IS MY SPEED!*

WHEN NIGHT COMES, YOU'RE AT PEACE WITH YOURSELF AND WITH MAE. YOU PERFORM YOUR CHORES UNCOMPLAININGLY, AND WHEN HER CEASELESS PRATTLE STARTS, YOU TRY TO LISTEN... TRY TO BE INTERESTED... TRY NOT TO DRIFT OFF INTO THAT INEVITABLE SLEEP...

I HAD MY *EYE* ON THAT *SHEER NAVY BLUE*, UNTIL I SAW *JENNIE BOYCE* WEARING THE *SAME THING!* WELL, IF THAT'S *HER* TASTE, IT CERTAINLY ISN'T *MINE*, AND I...

BUT YOU CAN'T HELP IT! THE VEIL DESCENDS! THE BLACK VEIL! AND THEN SOMETHING STARTLES YOU OUT OF THAT SOUND SLEEP. THE SMELL PERHAPS... THE SWEET OILY SMELL OF BENZINE. IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU, ED... SOAKING YOUR PANTS.. THE CHAIR... THE RUG.

OH... *MAE! MY HEAD! IT'S SWIMMING!*

IT *SHOULD* BE! I PUT ENOUGH OF THOSE *PILLS* IN YOUR COFFEE...

YOU TRY TO MOVE, BUT YOU'RE PARALYZED. AND THEN YOU SEE MAE TAKE OUT THE PACK OF STARLINGS, LIGHT ONE, AND DRAG DEEP AT IT, MAKING THE RED-ORANGE TIP GLOW BRIGHTLY. THERE'S SOMETHING UNSPEAKABLY EVIL IN HER SMILE AS SHE SNAPS THE BURNING BUTT AT YOU...

MAE!?

..DIDN'T KNOW I SMOKE, DID YOU, ED?

EVERYTHING BURSTS INTO BRIGHT YELLOW FLAME, JUST LIKE IN YOUR DREAM, ED. ONLY IT'S *NOT MAE* THAT'S BURNING! IT'S *YOU!* YOUR CLOTHES! YOUR CHAIR! THE RUG! ALL ONE ROARING INFERNO. AND THROUGH IT ALL, MAE'S VOICE, LAUGHING AS YOU DIE IN AGONY...

NOW, YOU ROTTEN TIRESOME BORE... YOU CAN SLEEP FOREVER! GOOD-BYE!

GOOD BOY

MR. CRANE LOOKED ON WITH A GREAT INWARD SATISFACTION, ALTHOUGH, IT MUST BE ADMITTED, HE WINCED EACH TIME HIS NEIGHBOR, JIM WARD, LANDED HIS BIG HAND HEAVILY ON YOUNG PAUL'S POSTERIOR. THE BOY'S CRIES OF PAIN FAIRLY SHOOK THE WARD LIVING ROOM WHOSE DUST AND UNTIDINESS BESPOKE OF MRS. WARD'S LONG ABSENCE. FOR JIM WARD'S WIFE HAD DIED TWO YEARS PREVIOUSLY AND LEFT HIM A WIDOWER WITH A MOTHERLESS SON...

YOU KNOW I *TRY* TO BE AN *UNDERSTANDING* NEIGHBOR, WARD, BUT WHEN I *SAW* YOUR KID *DELIBERATELY* THROW THAT ROCK THROUGH MY WINDOW...

OKAY, CRANE! *OKAY!* NOW... UHH... *NOW, WILL YOU BE GOOD, PAUL?! NOW?!* UHH...

BOBBY... *OWWW*... BOBBY *TOLD* ME TO DO IT! HE... SOB... *MADE* ME, DADDY... *OWWWWW*...

JIM WARD'S HAND STOPPED IN MID-AIR, AND A FEELING OF GUILT CREPT OVER HIM...

BOBBY? HE'S THE *WILSON* BOY, *ISN'T* HE, CRANE? HE'S *NINE YEARS OLD* AND, *AFTER ALL*, PAUL IS ONLY *SEVEN*. IF *HE*...

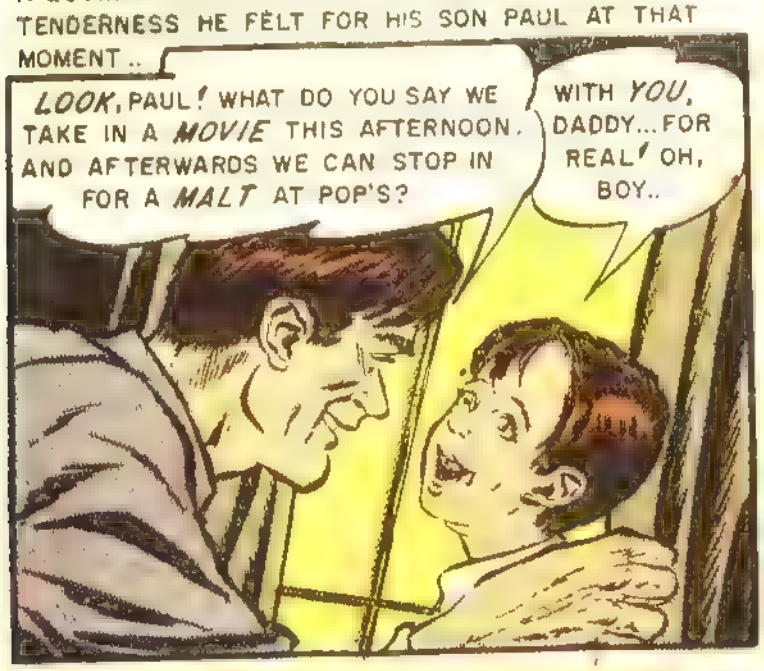
WELL IF THE *WILSON* BOY PUT YOUR PAUL UP TO IT, WARD, HE DID IT BY *TELEPHONE*, BECAUSE HE WAS *NOWHERE IN SIGHT!*

MR. CRANE THEN STALKED OUT OF THE WARD HOME, IN A HUFF AT HAVING BEEN DEPRIVED OF HIS FULL SATISFACTION. AFTER HE'D LEFT, A WARM GLOW AROSE BETWEEN FATHER AND SON...

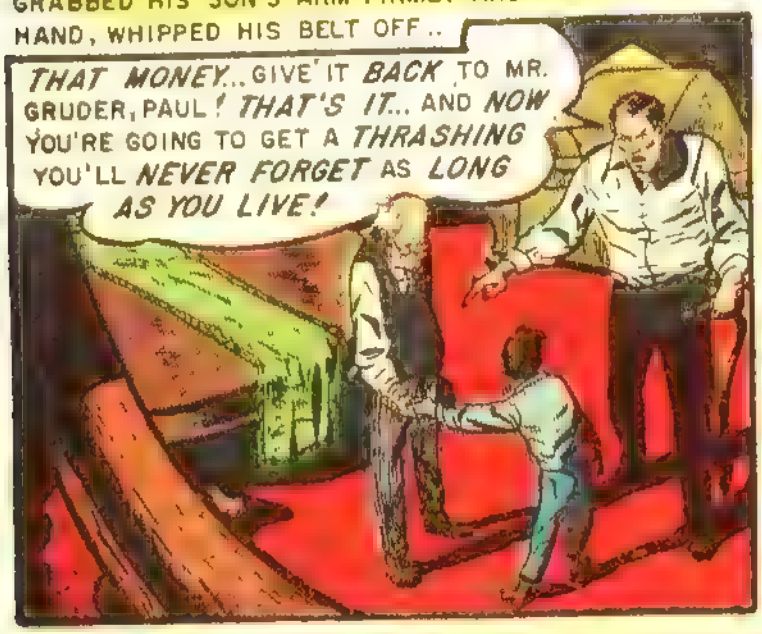
YOU *KNEW* IT WAS *WRONG*, PAUL... EVEN IF BOBBY WILSON *DID* MAKE YOU DO IT!

I WON'T DO IT AGAIN, DADDY!

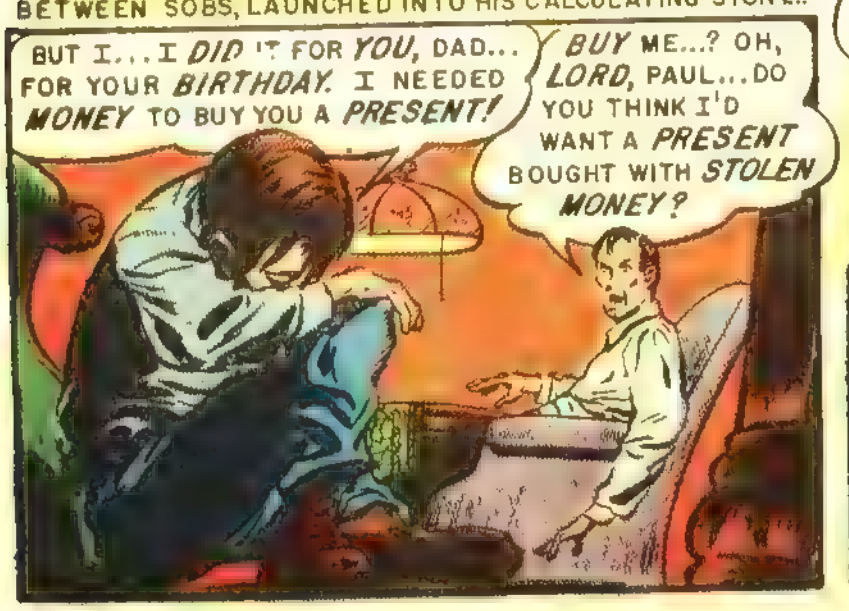
YES, JIM WARD WAS A STRICT FATHER, BUT HE WAS A LOVING FATHER TOO, AND HE MELTED WITH THE TENDERNESS HE FELT FOR HIS SON PAUL AT THAT MOMENT..


LOOK, PAUL! WHAT DO YOU SAY WE TAKE IN A MOVIE THIS AFTERNOON. AND AFTERWARDS WE CAN STOP IN FOR A MALT AT POP'S?
WITH YOU, DADDY... FOR REAL! OH, BOY..

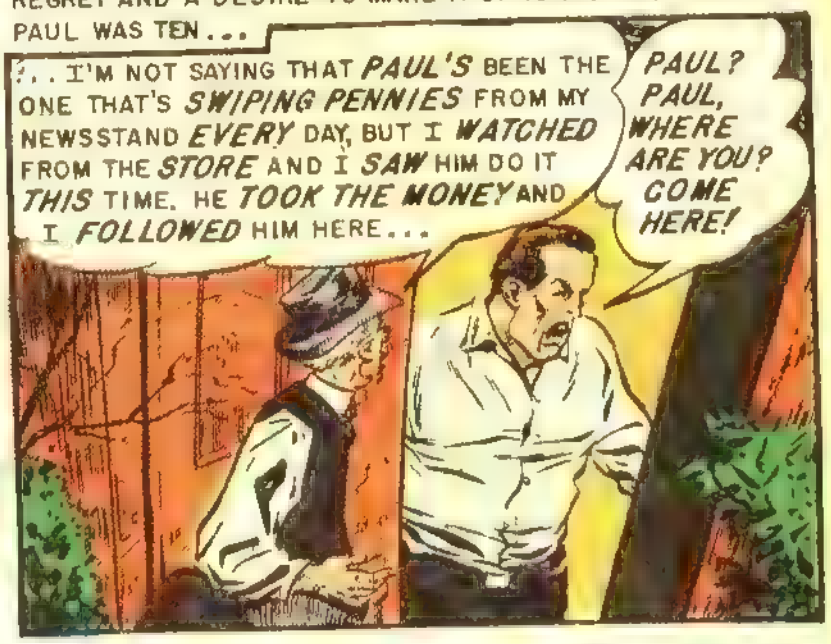
PAUL EDGED INTO THE LIVING ROOM FROM HIS HIDING PLACE UNDER THE HALL STAIRS. MR. WARD GRABBED HIS SON'S ARM FIRMLY AND WITH HIS FREE HAND, WHIPPED HIS BELT OFF..


THAT MONEY... GIVE IT BACK TO MR. GRUDER, PAUL! THAT'S IT... AND NOW YOU'RE GOING TO GET A THRASHING YOU'LL NEVER FORGET AS LONG AS YOU LIVE!

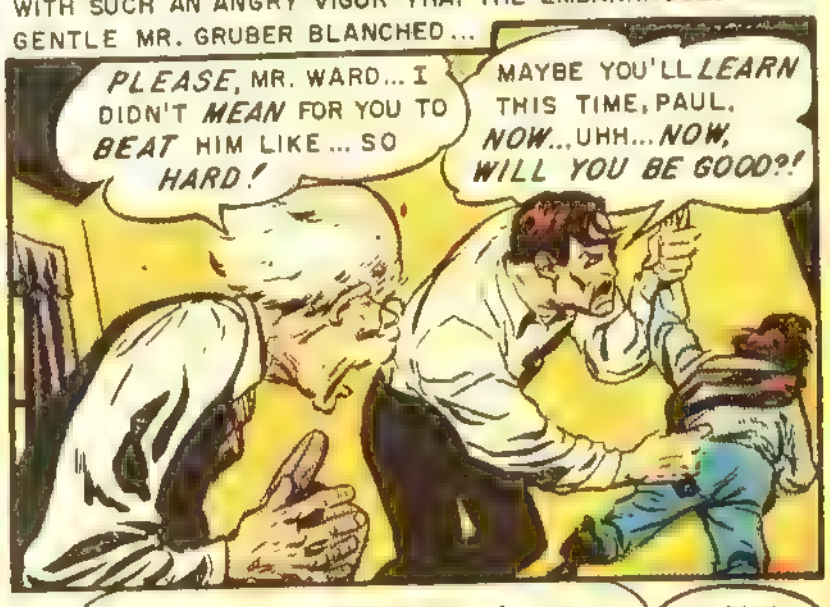
AS QUICKLY AS HE COULD, MR. GRUDER SLIPPED FROM THE WARD HOME. THEN, JIM WARD SANK WEARILY INTO A CHAIR, PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTED. PAUL, BETWEEN SOBS, LAUNCHED INTO HIS CALCULATING STORY..


BUT I... I DID IT FOR YOU, DAD... FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY. I NEEDED MONEY TO BUY YOU A PRESENT!
BUY ME...? OH, LORD, PAUL... DO YOU THINK I'D WANT A PRESENT BOUGHT WITH STOLEN MONEY?

EVEN AT THE AGE OF SEVEN, PAUL WARD KNEW HOW TO GET AROUND HIS FATHER. AND AS THE YEARS PASSED, HE BECAME MORE AND MORE ADEPT AT IT... CLEVERLY SWITCHING HIS FATHER'S OFFENSIVE ANGER TO A DEFENSIVE REGRET AND A DESIRE TO MAKE IT UP TO THE BOY. WHEN PAUL WAS TEN...


...I'M NOT SAYING THAT PAUL'S BEEN THE ONE THAT'S SWIPING PENNIES FROM MY NEWSSTAND EVERY DAY, BUT I WATCHED FROM THE STORE AND I SAW HIM DO IT THIS TIME. HE TOOK THE MONEY AND I FOLLOWED HIM HERE...
PAUL? PAUL, WHERE ARE YOU? COME HERE!

THE FATHER LAID INTO HIS SON WITH THE BELT-STRAP WITH SUCH AN ANGRY VIGOR THAT THE EMBARRASSED AND GENTLE MR. GRUBER BLANCHED...



I WAS ONLY BORROWING IT! I WAS GOING TO PAY MR. GRUDER BACK! I SWEAR IT! I JUST HAD TO GET YOU SOMETHING FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY! YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A SWELL GUY TO ME...
OH, PAUL... PAUL...

PAUL ALWAYS SUCCEEDED. THAT SOFT MELLOWNESS CAME OVER JIM AGAIN... THAT MIXTURE OF GUILT AND TENDERNESS.

I TELL YOU WHAT, SON! MAYBE I HAVE BEEN A LITTLE TIGHT ON YOUR ALLOWANCE. A FELLOW'S GOT TO HAVE MONEY TO SPEND AND TO SAVE. WE'LL MAKE IT A DOLLAR A WEEK... STARTING NOW!
GOSH, YOU'RE A SWELL GUY, DAD!

THERE WERE MORE SPANKINGS AND MORE GENTLE RECONCILIATIONS AS THE YEARS WENT BY. THE LAST SPANKING CAME THE DAY JIM CAUGHT PAUL ON A STREET CORNER WITH SOME YOUNG HOODLUMS. PAUL WAS SMOKING...

CIGARETTES... AT THIRTEEN! WHAT'LL IT BE AT FIFTEEN... BOOTLEG LIQUOR?! WILL YOU... UHH... WILL YOU BE GOOD NOW, PAUL?! WILL YOU!?
CUT IT OUT, DAD! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M NOT A KID ANYMORE?

JIM STOPPED HIS WILD SWINGING AT HIS SON. HE LOOKED AT THE SMIRKING HOODLUMS AND HE UNDERSTOOD WHAT HIS SON MUST HAVE BEEN FEELING...

I... I DIDN'T MEAN TO SHAME YOU IN FRONT OF YOUR FRIENDS, PAUL... BUT SMOKING! YOU'RE SO YOUNG! WHY CAN'T YOU BE GOOD?
I WASN'T SMOKING, DAD! ONE OF THEM DARED ME TO TAKE A PUFF, AND THAT'S WHEN YOU CAME ALONG! GOSH, YOU WOULDN'T WANT ME TO LOOK YELLOW, WOULD YOU?

JIM WARD HEAVED A SIGH OF REGRET AND TEARS GLISTENED IN THE CORNERS OF HIS EYES. IT WAS THE SAME OLD STORY... THE SAME OLD SWITCH. HE RUFFLED HIS SON'S HAIR FONDLY AND GRINNED AT HIM...

THAT WATCH OF MINE YOU ALWAYS LIKED, PAUL... IT'S YOURS! I GUESS YOU'RE GROWN UP ENOUGH TO HAVE A WATCH OF YOUR OWN NOW!
YOU MEAN THE WATCH MOM GAVE YOU...? GEE, THANKS, DAD! THANKS!

PAUL KEPT OUT OF TROUBLE AFTER THAT... AT LEAST HE WAS CAREFUL NOT TO BE CAUGHT... AND THERE WERE NO MORE SPANKINGS. ONE DAY, WHEN HE WAS EIGHTEEN, HIS FATHER WAS CALLED INTO THE OFFICE OF PAUL'S HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL...

THESE LOCKER THEFTS HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME TIME NOW, MR. WARD. YOUR SON IS THE FIRST BOY WE'VE CAUGHT CARRYING ANY OF THE STOLEN ITEMS.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY FOR YOURSELF, PAUL?

PAUL LOOKED HIS FATHER SQUARE IN THE EYE...

I DIDN'T KNOW THIS WALLET WAS STOLEN, DAD. SOME FELLOW CAME UP TO ME OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL AND SOLD IT TO ME FOR A DOLLAR. I NEVER SAW HIM... BEFORE... OR SINCE THEN...
HAVE YOU ANY PROOF THAT MY SON ISN'T TELLING THE TRUTH, MR. WALKER?

MR. WALKER, THE PRINCIPAL, HEMMED AND HAWED

WELL, IT'S JUST THAT YOUR *SON* GOES WITH THE *WORST* BOYS IN THE *SCHOOL*. BUT IF I AM *MISTAKEN*...

YOU *ARE* MISTAKEN, SIR .. AND I RESENT THE *EMBARRASSMENT* YOU'VE CAUSED MY BOY. I INTEND TO *TAKE* THIS MATTER UP WITH THE *SCHOOL BOARD*. PAUL IS A *GOOD BOY!*

LATER, AFTER SCHOOL, PAUL WARD MET A FRIEND

SO YOU GOT *AWAY* WITH IT, *EH*, PAUL?

MY OLD MAN HAD WALKER *CRAWLING*, SID. JUST THE SAME, WE'D *BETTER LAY OFF THOSE LOCKERS!*

AND WHEN PAUL GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL, HE HAD A TALK WITH HIS PROUD FATHER...

THERE'S GOT TO BE *SOME* WAY FOR ME TO GO TO COLLEGE, DAD! A GUY'S A *DEAD DUCK* WITHOUT A *PROFESSION* THESE DAYS!

I JUST HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO *SAVE* FOR YOUR EDUCATION, SON! YOUR MOTHER'S *ILLNESS* TOOK ALL I *HAD*...

WELL, IF YOU *CAN'T AFFORD IT*, YOU *CAN'T!* IT'S NOT JUST *MYSELF* I'M DISAPPOINTED FOR, DAD! IT WOULD'VE MADE *MOM* PROUD! SHE *WANTED* ME TO BE LIKE YOU YOU KNOW... *ADMIRED*. *RESPECTED*. BY *EVERYONE* IN *TOWN*...

IF I'VE *ACHIEVED* ANYTHING, IT'S BEEN THE *HARD WAY*, SON. I HAD TO *QUIT* HIGH SCHOOL .. GO TO *WORK* OF COURSE, THINGS WERE *DIFFERENT* IN *THOSE* DAYS...

BUT PAUL'S CONNIVING APPEAL AND FLATTERY WORKED. A FEW DAYS LATER...

I'VE *SWUNG IT*, PAUL. THE BANK GAVE ME A *THREE THOUSAND DOLLAR MORTGAGE* ON THE *HOUSE*. YOU CAN *GO* TO COLLEGE! *BE GOOD*, SON... FOR ME!

I *WILL*, DAD! YOU CAN *COUNT* ON IT! AND I WON'T *FORGET* THIS!

SO PAUL GOT WHAT HE WANTED. HE WENT TO COLLEGE. FOR TWO YEARS IT SEEMED AS THOUGH PAUL HAD REALLY SETTLED DOWN. AND THEN MARK EGAN, FROM CHICAGO, CAME UPON THE SCENE...

YOU *LIKE* MY NEW BUS, EH, PAUL? YOU COULD *HAVE* ONE *LIKE* IT IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS IF YOU'D COME BACK TO *CHI* WITH ME.

I'VE GIVEN IT A LOT OF *THOUGHT!* MR. EGAN

...AND PAUL FELL FOR HIS FLASHY CLOTHES AND EXPENSIVE CAR

...AND I'VE DECIDED TO *CHUCK* EVERYTHING AND *JOIN* YOUR... YOUR ORGANIZATION. JUST GIVE ME TIME TO PACK UP AND PHONE MY OLD MAN..

SMART BOY! *SMART BOY!*

THERE WAS PLENTY OF MONEY AROUND CHICAGO IN 1928 AND PAUL WARD GOT HIS SHARE OF IT... FROM IMPORTING, HE TOLD HIS FATHER. YOU MIGHT STRETCH A POINT AND CALL *BOOTLEGGING WHISKEY* FROM CANADA *'IMPORTING'*...

THE POLICE CAUGHT UP WITH PAUL WHEN MARK EGAN DESERTED HIM ON THAT LAKE MICHIGAN BEACH AND DROVE OFF INTO THE NIGHT...

PAUL DIRECTED THE POLICE TO MARK EGAN'S HOME IN SUBURBAN CICERO...

AFTER HE'D SHOT MARK EGAN FOUR TIMES, PAUL MADE HIS BREAK, DIVING THROUGH THE FRENCH DOORS...

...AND STEALING THE DETECTIVES' OWN CAR...

PAUL RAN HOME... TO THE ONE PERSON WHO COULD HELP HIM...

YOU'VE GOT TO HIDE ME, DAD! THEY'LL BE HERE SOON... LOOKING FOR ME. WHATEVER THEY SAY I DID IS A LIE! A LIE!
I'LL NEVER LET THEM TAKE YOU FROM ME, PAUL!

BUT WHEN THE DETECTIVES CAME WITH THEIR WARRENT, THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE JIM WARD. THEY SEARCHED THE HOUSE, GUNS DRAWN...

LISTEN, MR. WARD! WE SAW YOUR SON KILL A MAN IN COLD BLOOD! WE SAW IT! HE'S A MURDERER! STOP PROTECTING HIM!
YOU SAW... PAUL... CHOKE... MY SON... A MURDERER!
NOW WHAT ABOUT THAT CLOSET?

SUDDENLY JIM WARD SEEMED TO GO CRAZY. HE SNATCHED THE DETECTIVE'S GUN FROM HIS HAND, EMPTIED AT THE CLOSET DOOR...

BY THE TIME THE DETECTIVE HAD RECOVERED, MR. WARD HAD HANDED BACK THE SMOKING GUN...

JIM WARD WAITED UNTIL THE DETECTIVES WERE GONE. THEN HE OPENED THE CLOSET DOOR. PAUL'S BULLET-RIDDLED, BLOODY, LIFELESS BODY PITCHED OUT...

THE FATHER SAT UPON THE FLOOR CRADLING THE SON'S HEAD IN HIS LAP, STARING AT THE BLIND, DEAD EYES...

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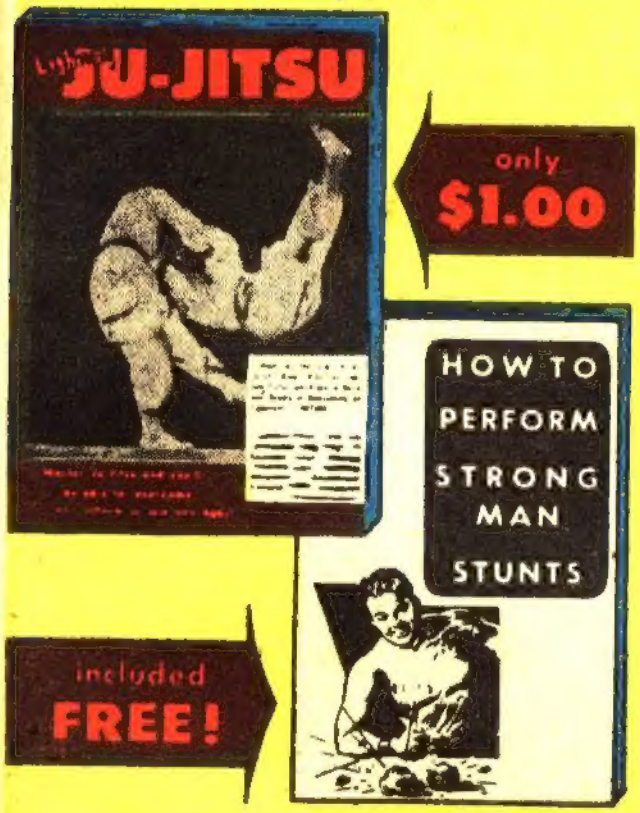

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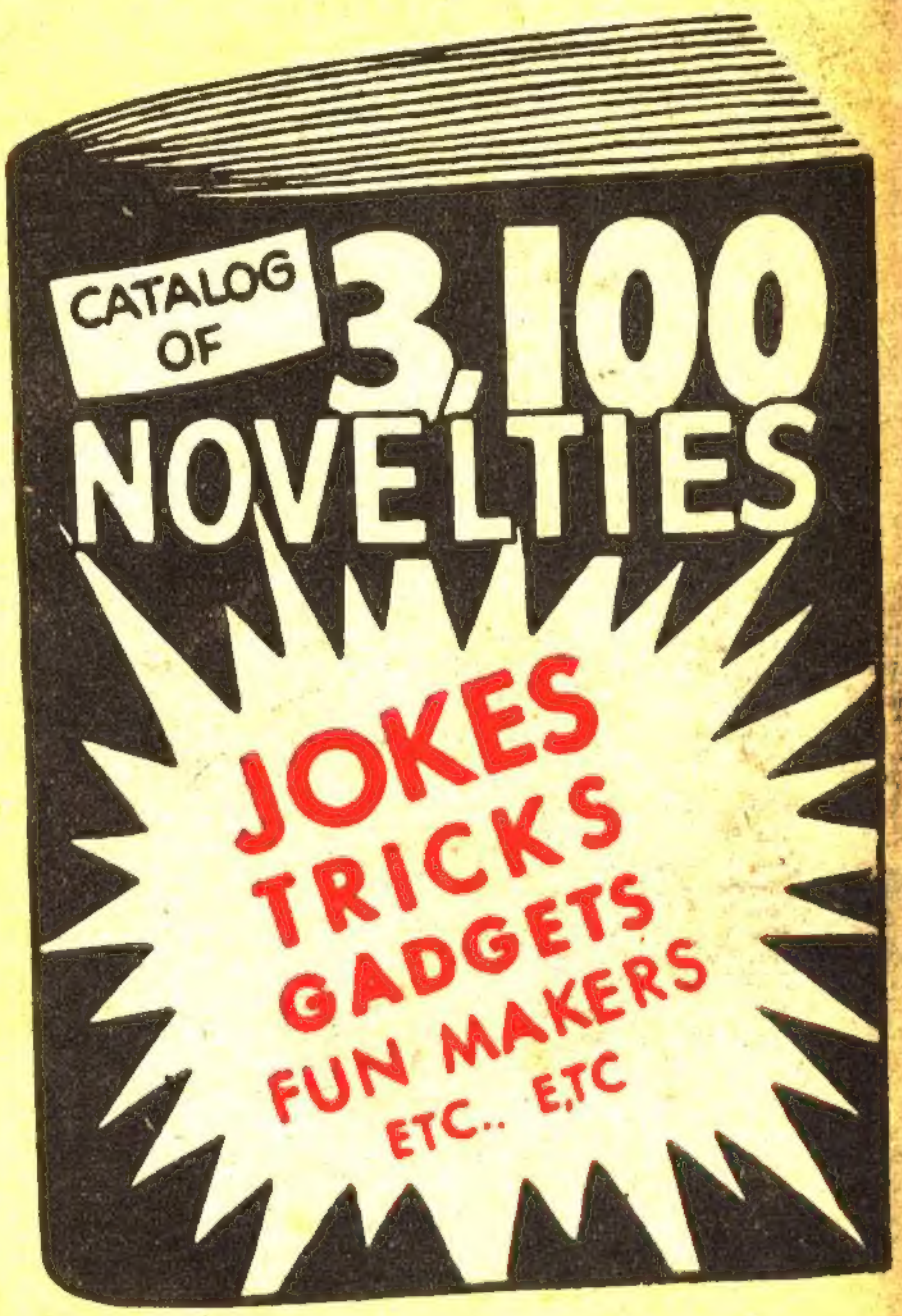

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